



**Educate, Participate, Motivate**

## **TIPS FOR PARENTS**

### **Know the facts**

Most adults are unaware that there are serious consequences associated with teen driving. If they are not worried about their teen drivers, they should be. A motor vehicle crash is the single most likely event to kill or injure a young person. The average on-the-road practice time in public and private driver education courses is about six hours. Tennessee's graduated driver's license law requires 50 hours of guided practice time, ten at night. Well documented research studies show that 50 hours of practice is a bare minimum for improving the chances that teens will drive crash free during the first few months behind the wheel.

### **Be a good role model**

In a survey by the American Automobile Association (AAA), eighty percent (80%) of young people indicated that parents are their role models for driving. Remember, children learn more from what they see than what they hear. When driving, make sure to do the following:

- Check the side and rearview mirrors before starting the car.
- Maintain a safe distance between you and the car in front.
- Signal when changing lanes.
- Observe traffic signs and signals.
- Adjust the speed according to driving conditions (congestion, roadway and weather).
- Keep your cool on the road; treat other motorists with respect and dignity regardless of their behavior.
- Always wear a safety belt no matter how short the trip.
- Share the road safely by not tailgating or cutting anyone off.
- Eliminate distractions, such as eating and talking on the phone, to the maximum extent possible.

### **Develop a game plan for guided practice**

- Practice being a passenger in the vehicle so you will know what the road looks like from that position
- Plan a route or area beforehand and drive it yourself.
- Discuss the practice plan with your teen and try to use the same vehicle in each practice session.
- Take the guided practice in stages of increasing difficulty – empty parking lot, residential/rural area, city/business district, shopping center, major highway, freeway/interstate, night driving, and inclement weather.
- Keep the sessions short at first (15 to 20 minutes) and work up to an hour. Practice as frequently as possible to build on lessons learned in previous driving sessions.
- Give the teen driver two to three practice trials on a new maneuver and then allow them to do it without direction.
- Once the teen driver has gained experience and graduated from the learners permit stage, maximize the opportunities for driving i.e., running errands, picking up siblings, etc.

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## **Take the guided practice sessions seriously**

- Schedule the time and locations of the sessions just as you would any other important meeting or activity.
- Make sure the car the teen driver uses is safe and properly maintained.
- Avoid talking on the cell phone, reading a book, writing or other activity that suggests you are not fully involved in the practice session.

## **Communicate clearly**

- Don't give the beginning driver too much instruction at once. Take it one step at a time.
- Avoid talking to the novice driver about matters unrelated to driving.
- Reward good performance. Praise the teen driver when they do something correctly or show improvement.
- Pull over and park frequently, every 10 to 20 minutes, to review performance. Don't critique while driving.
- Use the best terms. Say RIGHT for direction and CORRECT when something is done correctly. Identify cars by COLOR and not make and model.
- Speak clearly and distinctly in a calm voice. Avoid screaming, shouting or gasping.
- Give directions in the order that you want the teen to perform them. For instance, say, "At the next light, turn right."
- Make instructions clear and allow sufficient time to respond.
- Have the novice driver evaluate their own performance at the end of each session.

## **Expect Mistakes**

Stay calm and keep a sense of humor, but don't laugh at silly mistakes the new driver will surely make. If the novice driver makes a mistake that is dangerous or critical, pull over immediately. Smaller mistakes can wait. There are several common mistakes that most novice drivers will make.

- Fail to keep a safe distance around the entire car (drive too close to parked cars or other obstacles, drift toward oncoming cars)
- Grip the steering wheel too tightly
- Have difficulty with multi-tasking, e.g., steering the car when they remove a hand to use the turn signal
- Turn the entire body to check a blind spot, rather than just glancing over the shoulder
- Drive too fast through intersections, on curves or for current weather and road conditions
- Fail to avoid or anticipate the mistakes and bad driving of others
- Inaccurately judge the time and distance needed to complete a maneuver
- Slow down when changing lanes or merging
- Forget which way the wheels are turned when pulling out of a parking space
- Do not look both ways before moving forward on a green light

## **Choose the right stuff**

Make sure the public or private driving course your teen attends has professionally trained instructors and is well equipped. The school should have adequate classroom space, proper equipment and instructional material, vehicles that are in good condition and licensed instructors. There should also be a total of 30 classroom hours of instruction and at least six hours of in-car driving practice. Choose a safe car with features that help avoid or survive a crash such as airbags, antilock brakes, good stability and daytime running lights. Consider the crash worthiness and experience of the vehicle.

## **Manage the Use of the Car**

- Require a supervised driving period of at least 50 hours.
- Set a night driving curfew.
- Limit passengers in the vehicle because friends can be a distraction.
- Require the driver and all passengers to wear safety belts and adopt a zero tolerance policy for alcohol or drug use and speeding.
- Strongly discourage eating, talking on the cell phone and other distracting behaviors.